



Express

MONTANA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF & THE BLIND

giving kids the building blocks to independence

Volume XXV, Issue 1, Fall 2018



EOS Performs at Griz Game

Page 7

Statewide Magnifying Reader Project

Pages 8 & 9



Dear Families, Students, Staff and Community Stakeholders,

The school year started with a deep breath, and we haven't slowed down! Everyone has been working hard on so many levels. The Education Program has been focused on accreditation – both state and national, examining instructional practices and student performance and growth. The Residential Program has been busy redefining themselves as you'll see later in this edition to the Student Life Program. The Outreach Program has been busy working in schools across the state and implementing programs such as Deaf Enrichment Weekend, Visually Impaired Enrichment Weekend, and Untangling the Dots. Staff members have gotten professional development and presented at conferences both in Montana and across the country. And it's just the end of October as I write this.

As we get busy and the weather changes, we sometimes forget to keep ourselves grounded. We run around trying to accomplish everything on our to-do lists. We juggle our adult schedules with our children's after-school events, clubs, and competitions. We might be single parents trying to do it all, or we might have supportive or unsupportive partners to help us or hinder us. We start to float and run on fumes. We stop taking care of ourselves. We get sick. We lose our grounding. We become unfocused or overly-focused and miss critical things.

Right this minute, I invite you to pause, take a deep inhalation and exhale slowly. Do it again. One more time. Look around you. Are you grounded? Are you balanced? Are you aligned – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually?

At the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind (MSDB), we are asking ourselves these same questions. Are we grounded or are we trying to check off our to-do items? Are we fulfilling our mission as a school and as a statewide resource? Are we aligned with our beliefs? Are the events and activities we sponsor helping us reach our goals? I say yes! We provide campus-based education using state standards and Individual Education Plans (IEPs). We provide access to American Sign Language, to Speech and Language Services (SLP) and audiological services, to the Expanded Core Curriculum, and to Orientation and Mobility. We provide enrichment activities both after school and on special weekends. We have a residential option for students who live outside of the Great Falls area to be able to attend school here for direct instruction from specifically trained staff. We provide resources statewide through our Consultants to ensure students not attending our school are able to access their education through appropriate accommodations. And those students are always able to attend our special weekend events and summer programs.

We invite you to visit! Come and see the amazing work everyone here does! MSDB is an amazing place to work, to learn, and to grow! If you would like a tour, please contact us. We would be thrilled to show you what we do and to learn from you how we can better serve students across Montana who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. ❖

Wishing you peace,

Donna E Sorensen
MSDB Superintendent

dsorensen@msdb.mt.gov
406-771-6001 voice
406-760-1068 videophone
503-409-5576 cell voice/text



Brenda Warren

Brenda Warren grew up in Helena, Montana. When she was a young woman she attended Montana State University, and later attended the University of Great Falls to earn her education credentials.

As a literacy specialist Warren spent 13 years teaching at East

Middle School, EMS, in Great Falls where she empowered adolescents to become readers and writers. For two of those years she worked as an instructional coach facilitating teacher success in teaching writing wall-to-wall at EMS.

Warren's daughter is a 2013 graduate of both MSDB and Great Falls High School. She is a 2018 graduate of Gallaudet University. This is Warren's first year teaching at MSDB, and she is excited for the opportunity to give back to a school that provided so much support for her family during her daughter's formative years. ■■



Kimberly Cortez

Hello, I'm the new Behavior Counselor in Geyser. I hold a master's in clinical counseling from the University of Providence, and have many years of experience working in children's mental health, both in the residential as well as the school settings.

I'm currently working on a class taught by Karen Wolffe in

career education for the visually impaired. I look forward to learning and understanding ways to support our students at MSDB in achieving independence and living full lives.

My husband and I were raised in a small desert town in southern Arizona. I moved a long time ago to Great Falls when I was 18, so some people tell me I'm from here now. I love the cold weather, snow, cool rain, and clean air up here. After growing up in the Sonoran desert, I can tell you, the sun is highly overrated.

Outside of work, I enjoy fishing, camping, reading daily, photography, cooking big meals, and being creative. I also like spending time with our pit-bull, Lila, and our crazy little English bulldog, Ruana. We recently bought a new home, so I am busy getting settled, painting, sewing curtains, and making the house our home. ■■

IN THIS ISSUE

Page 2

- Dear Families, Students, Staff and Community Stakeholders

Page 4

- Bowling Day
- Together Again

Page 5

- Preschooler in Search of Box Tops
- Science Experiments

Page 6

- Outreach in the Classroom
- Travel Day Fun

Page 7

- EOS Performs at Griz Game

Page 8-9

- Prodigy 12 Magnifying Reader Project

Page 10-11

- Donations

Page 12

- After School Excitement
- Know The Glow

Page 13

- Goalball & Soccer Fun In Kalispell

Page 14

- Signing Saturdays School

Page 15

- Residential Programs or...Student Life... It is the Best!
- Untangling the Dots

Page 16

- MSDB Celebrates White Cane Day

Bowling Day

By Tyson Patterson, Athletic Director

The United States Association of the Blind has decided to promote fitness and recognize people with visual impairments the week of October 1-7 this year. October 6th is National Blind Sports Day. They want to make this the first of many National Blind Sports Days with the dream of one day turning it into International Blind Sports Day but we can only do that with everyone's support.

What is National Blind Sports Day? Sport and fitness have the power to provide people, who are blind and visually impaired with the framework to set goals, build work ethic and live a healthier lifestyle. The goal of National Blind Sports Day (NBSD) is to celebrate the abilities of and opportunities available to Americans with visual impairments and increase awareness of sports for the blind.

Here at Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB) we decided as a group to take the students bowling. The Visually Impaired department was going to participate since it is recognized as their day. However, we decided to include everyone since this day is about increasing awareness. The whole school and most of our staff were in attendance. We also included 7 student athletes from The University of Providence of Great Falls to come help with the activities, which allowed them to gain knowledge of what MSDB is all about.

The students had a great time getting out of the



Bowling day.

classroom and participating in such a wonderful activity. They socialized, worked as a group, and created many memories. I know University of Providence and our students here at MSDB want to make this a regular event. The students are anxious for what event is to come next. ☒



Together Again!

By Emily LaSalle - Outreach

Five years ago Dawn Marxer began working together with Colby as a personal care assistant. This fall Dawn started her first year as a teacher for Browning Public Schools! Congratulations Dawn! We are so very proud of you. Dawn and Colby are together again this year in the teacher and student capacity! ☒

Dawn and Colby together again.



Box Tops
removed from
food products.

Preschooler in Search of Box Tops!

By Miss Merja Mackenzie - Teacher
Miss Myra - Student

Hello! This year we have decided to support our school, scissor, and gluing skills by collecting Box Tops! This is a great way to raise money for our school that doesn't cost us anymore than we are already spending. Our little Miss Myra (4 yo) is collecting Box Tops throughout the school. She is always over-the-top excited to find them in our collection containers. If you feel inclined to send us some love in the form of Box Tops we would be so grateful! Thank you for supporting our fine motor skills and school!



Science Experiments

By Missie Hill - Special Ed Coordinator

Science class can be daunting at times due to the vast amounts of new vocabulary, all those elements, weird chemical reactions, and everything else science brings.

However science can be so much fun. Hands-on activities have proven to be beneficial for teaching, and that is true, even at Montana School for the Deaf and Blind.

While studying DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) in Biology class, the students struggled because they had never seen DNA. Therefore students would have the exciting challenge of pulling DNA out of fresh strawberries. The hope was that this hands-on activity would help them understand DNA and all that it can do.

They studied all the necessary information leading up to the lab and were a bit skeptic that we could make this activity work. However, once they began, they were too interested to doubt. They started by crushing up strawberries and mixed them with ingredients found in any kitchen. They then strained out the juices into a test tube. They poured ice cold rubbing alcohol on top and watched the magic take place.

Within seconds tiny white flecks and stringy things floated to the top. The students carefully extracted them with tweezers and placed them on prepared slides. The moment had arrived! To actually see DNA with your own eyes rather than just in a picture was exciting for them.

Once the slides were under the microscopes, students were intently searching for the elusive particles. The room was silent. Then one student yelled: "Wow! How Cool!" She had to show the staff what she found.

This activity brought the concept to life for the students. They now had that connection that many need to understand new ideas. The whole lab took less than one class period but the impact will carry on for a long time.

The look on the students' faces and the excitement in the air is something I will always remember. That is what makes working with kids worthwhile. ■■



Strawberry DNA lab.



Preschool introduction by Miss Merja.

Outreach in the Classroom

By Emily LaSalle - Outreach

Working together MSDB Outreach Consultants joined MSDB Campus Staff discovering the learning and adventures happening in their classrooms. Our thanks to our teachers for sharing their creativity, knowledge and experience giving us the opportunity to witness the amazing educational opportunities our school offers. Parents of our Outreach students across the state if you would like to schedule a tour and witness for yourself the many advantages of our campus school please reach out to your Outreach Consultant to schedule a visit. msdb.mt.gov/outreach



Travel Day Fun

By Missie Hill
Special Education Coordinator



Seth looking at the evidence.

Students look forward to the monthly Travel Day when they can go home and see family and friends. Their excitement makes it hard to focus on these days. Therefore, we created a unique plan. Rather than have students in their regular classrooms, Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind (MSDB) engages them in fun, yet meaningful activities.

On October 17, the Deaf/Hard of Hearing department participated in a mystery. The students were told that all of the chocolate for the upcoming Halloween celebration had been stolen. They were given a list of five suspects, which included the Principal, two Secretaries, a Counselor, and the School Psychologist.

Students and staff were divided up into three teams. They interviewed the suspects and collected evidence such as candy wrappers, pamphlets on Chocoholics Anonymous, etc. They looked for fingerprints as further evidence.

Each team took off excitedly to try and solve the mystery. The building was filled with laughter and footsteps as they raced from one suspect to another.

Once each team was done they discussed what they found. Then all teams got back together to discuss the mystery as a group. Each team stated who they thought was guilty and they had to have evidence to back it up. Through this process they narrowed the choices down to two suspects: the Psychologist and one of the Secretaries. Further discussion ensued and they all agreed it was Judy, our Education Secretary. She was promptly arrested, but alas, the chocolate was gone.

This activity encouraged communication, problem solving, teamwork, and critical thinking. The students really had a great time and the staff did too!! What a great way learn while having fun! ■■



Arresting the guilty party.



Expressions of Silence in the Washington Grizzly Stadium in Missoula.

EOS Performs at Griz Game

By Jennifer Wasson
Co-Director of Expressions of Silence

On September 22nd, during our cottage program's annual trip to the Griz game for Griz Kidz, Expressions of Silence (EOS) was asked to perform the Star Spangled Banner to open the game. As the UM Grizzly Marching Band played Our National Anthem, our students were on the field with them signing the words in front of a crowd of over 25,000 people. What a phenomenal experience!

Expressions of Silence is an amazing group of students and we are so proud of them. They practice and perform all year long for various groups across the state and they are wonderful ambassadors for our school and community.

Griz Kidz has been providing our students at MSDB the opportunity to attend the Griz game in Missoula for the past 14 years. Thanks to this organization, our students can experience the excitement of the football game first hand. The energy of the crowd, generosity of the community, and interaction with the football players is irreplaceable. Our school is very thankful for the relationship we have developed with the Griz Kidz program. Thank you, Griz Kidz! ■■

IEFA Week

By Missie Hill - Indian Education Coordinator

Indian Education Week was celebrated all over Great Falls September 17-21, 2018. Walk through a school and you could find different activities honoring Native Americans. The Montana School for the Deaf and Blind was no different.

The students were very excited to make things like warrior shields and animal masks. Some students created legends about animals or seasons. Others played Native American games. One group of older students got to help set up our teepee to celebrate the week.

Our teepee is not like any other in Great Falls. It is an 8 foot teepee created by the Salish-Kootenai tribe with poles prepared and blessed by the tribe. The canvas will forever carry a piece of our school family as it has hand prints of all staff and students decorating it. The students' hand prints are all around the bottom with the fingers reaching up and the staff hand prints are on the top with fingers reaching down. This symbolizes all of us reaching out to each other.

Our teepee continues to stand proud by the cafeteria building and will remain there through November, which is Native American Month.

One staff member stated, "Our teepee is the best one around." I would have to agree with that. ■■





Montana School *for the*

HELP US GIVE KIDS THE BUILD

Prodigi 12 Magnifying Reader Project Gains Ground

By MSDB Foundation

The Outreach Department has grown exponentially in recent years, and consultants are serving approximately 800 students who are living in their own communities across Montana. Since these particular students do not attend school on MSDB's campus, they cannot access the educational tools available onsite. Without the appropriate assistive technology, they struggle to keep up with school curriculum the same as their sighted peers.

This summer, the MSDB Foundation launched a statewide fundraising campaign to raise enough funds to purchase 100 CCTV Magnifying Reader devices. District 37 Lions Clubs agreed to match up to \$150,000 in order to purchase 50 of the 100 devices. When Outreach Director Carol Clayton-Bye gave a presentation at their convention, past Lions Club International (LCI) Foundation board member Dave Hanjy of Ennis spontaneously announced that he and his wife Marie would proudly purchase the first device. This presentation is portable and available to any group or civic club by request.

In turn, longtime Lion Stu Nicholson requested his friends and colleagues give to this project in lieu of gifts for his going away party held at D.A. Davidson on October 16. He and his wife Janie are moving away from Great Falls where they have supported many causes. Stu was a school board member and longtime advocate for education.



MSDB Outreach Director Carol Clayton-Bye, Lion Marie Hanjy, Lion Dave Hanjy, and MSDB Foundation Board Member/Lion Mark Willmarth at the State Convention in Butte.

This fall, an anonymous donor provided enough funding for eight units for the rural school districts with the least amount of resources. Many individual donors have contributed, and the first order of 10 units is in process. Travis Stevenson from OverHere Consulting says, "The Prodigi 12 costing \$3,000 is indicative of what we call

How You Can Help

With your help, the MSDB Foundation has been able to provide funds for services and equipment for the students at MSDB for over 30 years. The Foundation is committed to funding academic and extracurricular activities that help prepare students for independent lives. Please join us in that commitment by making a tax-deductible donation to www.msdb.mt.gov/foundation.html or mailing it to:

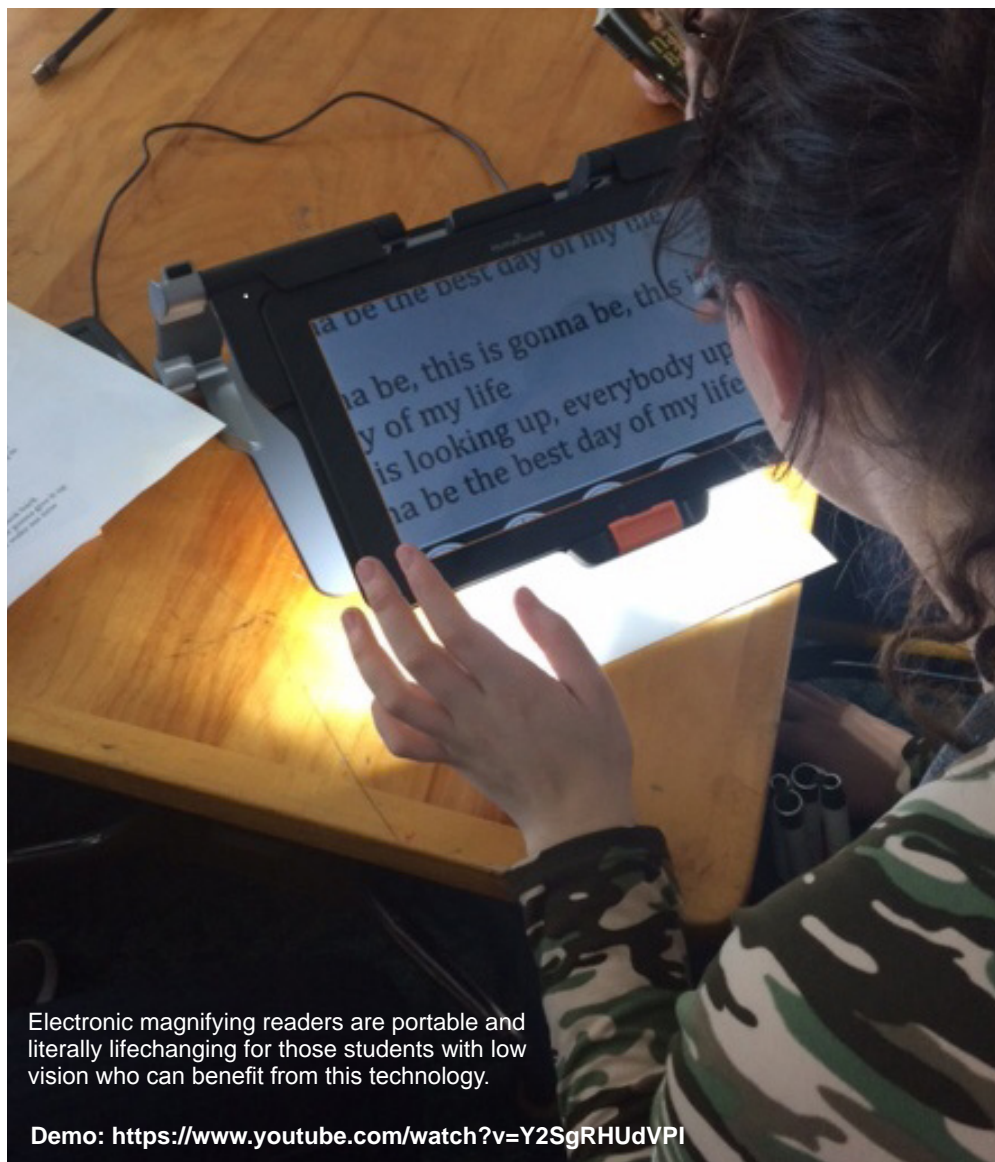
MSDB Foundation • P.O. Box 6576 • Great Falls, Mt 59406

For more information, please call 406-771-6040

Deaf & Blind Foundation

BUILDING BLOCKS TO INDEPENDENCE

the 'blind tax,' which means that because it is such a specialty market that cost savings of mass production does not apply. There simply isn't enough of a demand like an iPhone has, so the company can't pass this savings along to the client. Unfortunately, a regular tablet doesn't have enough magnification power for those who need 48pt font in order to read. This is a special device that meets the need of an important population whose assistive tech needs are unfortunately too expensive for most school districts to afford." Many teachers will provide course materials enlarged on a copier to help students keep pace. However, this is only good for a portion of classroom interaction. Stevenson went on to state that his company will provide a live demonstration of Humanware's Prodigy 12 on request. Please contact Bonnie Denoma at 406.771.6040 or foundation@msdb.mt.gov for more information. ■■



Electronic magnifying readers are portable and literally lifechanging for those students with low vision who can benefit from this technology.

Demo: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2SgRHUdVPI>

"Individually, we are one drop. Together we are an ocean."
—Ryunosuke Satoro

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In-Kind Donations
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Carole LaMont

**We also recognize the dedication and effort of all current MSDB Foundation Board Members
and we thank all past members for their service**

We have made every effort to confirm this record. If we have failed to record a gift or record a gift incorrectly we apologize. Please drop us a note so we can correct our records.

After School Excitement

By Brenda Warren - DHH Teacher

When I accepted a teaching position at Montana School for the Deaf and Blind, one of my assignments was to work on life skills and other enrichment activities with students in the residential setting after school. This is a new program offering. Both residential and day students are welcome.

Our first activity was painting spirit rocks with words or pictures—something to create a bright spot in a day. While some students chose to draw pictures, others selected words of affirmation for their rocks. In bright colors they painted the words they selected: life, love, hope, Rock & Roll, truth, and Keep Fighting. We used a Sharpie to write MSDB 2018 on the bottom of each rock. After painting the rocks, we sprayed them with a clear lacquer so they would survive the elements. After they dried, we placed them around our campus. If you find one, keep it, or replant it somewhere in your community. Hopefully it will brighten a day.

Cooking and baking are life skills that lead to satisfied stomachs. In our after school enrichment program, students have enjoyed baking muffins, quick bread, and chocolate chip and peanut butter cookies. Traci, one of our 11th grade students selected a recipe to cook for dinner for her entire cottage. She chose chicken tacos. Together, we determined what ingredients the residential kitchen could provide, then we created a shopping list we filled at a local grocery store. While the other residents of Traci's cottage enjoyed an after school club, Traci prepared dinner for them. Her enthusiasm filled the kitchen as she cooked. She was excited to share her culinary prowess with the

other residents. You know that dinner is a hit when people ask for seconds. The girls loved it. Planning and cooking a meal to share with other people is a life skill that reaps delicious rewards.

On Fridays after school, some students take advantage of games in the activity room. We put our handheld devices aside, and engage in games including Sorry, Uno, Kings in the Corner, Candyland, Wii, Web Chase, and the occasional game of pool. Games can promote math literacy, cultural literacy, communication, teamwork, and good sportsmanship. They also help build relationships. When Angelina taught me to play Wii, she was able to laugh at my mistakes, and take pride in her teaching skills when I met with success.

In the future, our Orientation & Mobility specialist, Geri Darko, will join me and three visually impaired students, Maci, Miracle, and Lexi, on the Great Falls transit. We'll get off the transit at a destination that Maci will select. After spending time at our destination, we will board a transit heading back to MSDB. This practice traveling through the Great Falls community will help our students build the confidence needed to meet increasing independence.

From painting to cooking we are dipping our brushes into new activities, and enjoying some old standards like Uno, Sorry, and Candyland. The after school program in the cottage is opening avenues for communication and opportunities to practice skills that lead to greater independence for our students. ■■

Know The Glow

By Julie Wheatcroft and Sharon Woods

I would like to introduce you to a wonderful family: The Wheatcrofts. Their journey has been fraught with fear and extreme challenge as well as strong love and courage.

In 2017, Julie and Eric's third child, Conor was diagnosed with retinoblastoma at age eleven months. Retinoblastoma is a rare childhood eye cancer. A trip to Houston, Texas, confirmed that Conor has multiple tumors in both eyes. A race to 1. Save his life, 2. Save his eyes, and 3. Preserve as much vision as possible began. Conor continues to undergo treatment for his cancer in New York. Most recently his exam showed no new tumor



The Wheatcrofts.

growth. This is good news and the family hopes and prays that, later this fall when he returns for examination, the good news continues.

Julie, Eric and their families are passionate about helping others become educated about retinoblastoma. Although it is rare, early detection can save lives and prevent blindness. Often it is the parents that notice there is something different about their child's eyes in photographs. A lack of red reflex (Leukocoria: abnormal white eye reflex) in photos is an indication there may be a problem in the eye. This can be missed during doctor appointments due to the tumor not being in the area of the pupil but asking the practitioner to dim lights in the exam room may increase the possibility that a white reflex may be detected. In a photograph or during exam: if a white rather than a red reflex is detected, the child should

immediately be further evaluated by physicians ideally a pediatric ophthalmologist. The picture with this article shows Conor at the age of six months. Julie searched through photos after Conor's diagnosis and found that his white reflex was evident.

Each fall in October we celebrate White Cane Day and Blindness awareness. We strive to educate each other on blindness prevention. We also strive to improve public awareness of the amazing things persons with blindness and low vision can achieve when educational access and career opportunities are achieved. Please visit the following websites for more information on Retinoblastoma and Blindness Awareness:

<https://knowtheglow.org/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XH2Y8iKfDbQ>

<https://www.iapb.org/advocacy/world-sight-day/> ☐☐

Goalball & Soccer Fun In Kalispell

By Jane Garrison, TVI and Outreach Consultant

Northwest Association of Blind Athletes and Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind hosted a Saturday experience for students with blindness and low vision September 29th.

Stacey Gibbins ushered all 7 athletes onto the soccer field first thing in the morning, (in 45 degree weather no less), had them don eye shades and turned them loose with a soccer ball that had bells inside. The athletes consisted of 5 large and rambunctious teenage boys and two younger children so for the sake of safety the younger children were provided alternate activities on the field and in the gymnasium where other sound balls, koosh balls and a parachute were provided.

After an hour and a half of stumbles, tumbles, giggles and goofiness it was back into the gym to warm up and hydrate to prepare for goalball activities. Everyone was able to participate in this activity all together and it was quite touching to see big teenage boys interacting with and including the younger children.

Everyone had a lot of fun, got good exercise and made new friends. That's what it's all about! A special thanks to Donna Sorensen, MSDB Superintendent, for driving from Great Falls to Kalispell just to attend and participate. It was a treat to have her.

Here are a few facts about Paralympic 5-a-side soccer. This information was found at <https://www.paralympic.org/football-5-side>

Football 5-a-side, also known as blind football, is an adaptation of football for athletes with a visual impairment. The sport has been governed by the

International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) since 1996 and it is played with modified FIFA rules. It featured at the Paralympics for the first time at Athens 2004, and has been contested at every Games since. Brazil have won gold at every Paralympics.

World Championships take place every four years in between the Paralympics.

Football 5-a-side teams are made up of four outfield players and one goalkeeper.

Outfield players must be classified as completely blind (B1 category), which means they have very low visual acuity and/or no light perception, whilst the goalkeeper must be sighted or partially sighted (B2 or B3 category).

To ensure fair competition, all outfield players must wear eyeshades. Teams can also have off-field guides to assist them.

The ball makes a noise due to a sound system located inside that helps players orientate themselves. As a result spectators must remain silent whilst watching the game until a goal is scored.

Blind football is played on a rectangular field that measures 40m long and 20m wide. The whole length of the pitch must be covered by kickboards to prevent the ball from going out of play.

The duration of the match is 50 minutes, divided into two 25-minute halves. Each team can request a one-minute time-out in each half. During the last two minutes of both halves, and in case of an extra time, the timekeeper must stop the clock for a free kick, kick-in, goal kick and corner kick.

Signing Saturdays School

Almost Every Second Saturday of the Month

Mission for Families:

Increase ASL proficiency by interactions with Deaf Mentors and hearing signers in an ASL Immersion environment

Mission for Children:

Increase ASL and English (reading and writing) skills by participating in theme-based enjoyable and educational experiences

What:

Families from Great Falls and across the state are invited to participate in Signing Saturdays School. Adults and older, mature, independent children can interact with Deaf Mentors and hearing signers in an ASL Immersion environment in structured activities and informal conversations to increase expressive and receptive ASL skills.

While adults and older, mature, independent children interact with Deaf mentors and hearing signers, children will participate in structured enjoyable and educational activities centered on a theme, story, and travel destination. Activities and stories will be presented in an ASL environment with some experiences and emphasis on reading and writing English.

How:

Families who RSVP/Register can arrive Friday evening at 5pm for dinner in the cottages. Families not residing in Great Falls can stay in the cottages if space is available to attend the session on Saturday. Families can attend Friday evening only, Saturday only, or both sessions. Families can participate for one month or up to all 9 months.

There are no travel reimbursements for participating in Signing Saturdays School, however, if travel is a hardship, please contact Donna Sorensen or Carol Clayton-Bye to request a small scholarship. There is no fee for participating in Signing Saturdays School.

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Dates	Theme	Country	Ideas/Notes
11/9-11/10	Veteran's Day	Korea, Japan, Germany, Russia	Patriotism, review Pledge and Star Spangled Banner, other patriotic songs
12/7-12/8	Gallaudet Day	France	
	Holidays		
1/11-1/12	MLK	Antarctica	Penguins, science, layers of ice, MLK's life and legacy, racism and oppression
	Winter		
2/8-2/9	Kindness	Finland	
	Theory of Mind	Sweden	
3/15-3/16 (3 rd Sat.)		Ireland	
4/12-4/13	Flowers	Holland	
5/17-5/18 (3 rd Sat.)	Prom (HS)	Utopia	Older students attend Prom Friday night. Saturday could be Sex Ed Health information, signs for body parts.
	Fantasy (Elem)		Elementary participate in Castle theme. Design a "perfect world".

Residential Program or... Student Life... It is the Best!!!

By Jim Kelly II - Student Life Director

For many years, we have called ourselves the Residential Program or the Cottage Program and have been under the title of “Student Services”. This year, we will be engaged in many discussions about who we are and what we do. We are students’ homes away from their own homes. Our work in the cottage impacts students in a comprehensive way. We are looking at the concept of “Student Life” for our program. Many residential schools for the Deaf and for the Blind have changed to this concept of Student Life.

That means our program is now the “Student Life Program”. We continue to have cottages. My title will be “Student Life Director” instead of “Dean of Students” which sounds collegiate and implies discipline. We will be working on titles of other staff in this program over the course of this school year. Since we have Counselors, you might think they would be titled “Student Life Counselors”; however, most schools have a position called “Student Life Counselors” and those positions are the same as our Cottage Life Attendants. We are very fortunate to have licensed Counselors in our Student Life Program as many schools do not have licensed Counselors as part of their residential programs.

Throughout this school year, staff will be working together to understand and practice some of the concepts

related to “Student Life”. Staff in our program are committed to providing students with opportunities that will foster growth and development of independent living skills.

During orientation this year a quote from Dr. Frank Turk, who is often referred to as the “Father of Student Life” was shared with the Student Life staff.

*“Any and all student development programs can only be as strong as the depth of a predominantly student run, student-managed effort with adult support from behind, not up front. Adults are for and with them, 24/7. It is either you are with them or you are not at all, 24/7! You **Believe** in them; you **Encourage** them; you **Share** with them; and you **Trust** them (**BEST**). They need your intergenerational support, 24/7!”*

Dr. Turk was our commencement speaker at graduation in 2007. He made a lasting impact on many of those in the audience on that special day!

Look for additional information about our concept change throughout the school year. As always, don’t hesitate to contact me if you have concerns or questions regarding the Student Life Program at the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind. ❖

Untangling the Dots

By Susan Davis - Visually Impaired Outreach

The Untangling the Dots (UTD) workshop, held October 19-20th, brought together Outreach from the Visually Impaired department, public school classroom teachers, and paraprofessionals from across the state. The hardworking, dedicated, current and past participants of these workshops are crucial in helping our students learn braille. They spend countless hours working on lessons through the National Federation of the Blind’s Transcriber’s course to become Certified Transcriptionists. Their commitment is great. They must either complete all 20 lessons of the course, the last one being an intense 35-page manuscript, or complete 19 lessons and then take a rigorous test to demonstrate their proficiency.

The Untangling the Dots workshop not only gave participants much needed time to work, participants were also able to connect with instructor, Allison O’Day, who joined us through GoToMeeting all day Friday to answer questions, read lessons, and speak on the importance of braille during the working lunch. She acknowledged the hard work and dedication participants have put forth and encouraged them to stick with it! Pam Boespflug also joined us to give an update on the Prison Braille Program and to encourage participants to use the Program as a means for preparing braille materials for their students.

Participants ranged from first timers exploring braille and starting the course to diehards that have been to several workshops. One such diehard was Sue Mohler, who has been working toward her certification for seven years, overcoming many obstacles along the way: a change

in the braille code from English Braille American Edition (EBAE) to Unified English Braille (UEB), the course shutting down when funding was lost, and updates to Lesson 20 after she had completed her first manuscript causing her to have too many errors and requiring a redo of the entire assignment. It was a monumental moment when her 35-page manuscript rolled off the embosser. Everyone present knew the incredible amount of time and effort that went into having the final assignment completed and we were happy to be a part of this moment.

The Visually Impaired Outreach would like to extend a huge thank you to all participants, past and present, for taking on the task of learning the braille code and its many rules. You are instrumental in helping our students learn to read, and for that, we are grateful. We look forward to seeing familiar faces and perhaps a few new ones at our next Untangling the Dots workshop. Thank you, also, to the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind staff and Visually Impaired Department teachers for freeing up the Aspen gym and other classrooms for this event. Finally, thank you to the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind Foundation for helping fund this event and to Region II CSPD (Comprehensive System of Personnel Development) for their continued generous support. Without you, this would be a nearly impossible task. Montana is a large and rural state. Being able to “raise our own” braille teachers, and to “bring them together” for support is essential! Thank you! ❖



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MSDB Celebrates White Cane Day



VI students relaxing a bit.

White Cane Day is celebrated on MSDB's campus each year in mid-October in a variety of ways. This year, the Visually Impaired Department went all out to inform people across our campus and in the community about the independence of people with visual impairments.

Students in Mrs. Rutledge's assistive technology class explored a program called Adobe Spark Video and created a humorous presentation called "What Do You Do When You Meet a Sighted Person," by Sheila Steiner Amato. This satire was written in response to the many articles and short videos that have been created over the past several decades called "What Do You Do When You Meet a Blind Person." Mrs. Rutledge's students took pictures of sighted staff (or to be more politically correct, staff who

are sighted) and showcased the difficulties in their daily lives: difficulties attempting to navigate darkened areas, difficulties when communicating orally as opposed to using finger pointing and hand gestures, and the high price people who are sighted must pay for light bills.

An assembly was held at MSDB on White Cane Day, October 15, for all students and staff to view the presentation and listen to V.I.P. (Visually Impaired Performers) sing "I Will Never Ever Live Without My Cane" (parody of "We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together" by Taylor Swift). Cane Club had a poster design contest to highlight the independence of people with visual impairments. Dakota was announced as the winner during the assembly and everyone celebrated White Cane Day with homemade cookies from Schulte's 38th Street Store and Coffee House.

Students in the Visually Impaired Department planned additional activities during our travel home day to showcase their independence within the community. The entire department rode the city bus downtown. Students planned a route to OverHere Consulting, an assistive technology business in Time Square. While visiting this business, students and staff learned about new handheld magnifiers, note-takers, and braille displays for people with visual impairments. Afterwards, students were given directions to J.J.'s Bakery and were expected to demonstrate their very best cane techniques and street crossing skills to arrive safely and efficiently. Students self-advocated to place an order and independently paid for cinnamon rolls, cookies, lattes, or hot chocolate. When everyone was finished snacking and visiting, students navigated Downtown Great Falls to locate the Great Falls Transit Transfer Center and caught a bus back to MSDB.

This field trip was a great experience for everyone involved. It was the perfect way for students to show off their own skills and independence. Students and staff in the Visually Impaired Department would like to thank all the MSDB staff and Great Falls businesses involved in our successful White Cane Day celebration. ■■

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The current and past editions of Express can be found on the MSDB website at: www.msdb.mt.gov.

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